

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07 INR-07 LAB-04
NSAE-00 SIL-01 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 L-03 NSC-05 PA-01
PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 OMB-01 /069 W
-----301220Z 031038 /12

R 301130Z DEC 76
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6441
INFO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMCONSUL MADRAS
AMCONSUL BOMBAY
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT,ELAB,CE
SUBJECT: COMMUNIST PARTY ANGERS PM AS STRIKE CONTINUES

REF (A) COLOMBO 4725, (B) COLOMBO 4735

1. SUMMARY. THE PRIME MINISTER'S MOOD IS GRIM AS SHE FACES UP TO THE PROBLEMS WITH WHICH HER GOVERNMENT IS CONFRONTED (REF A). THERE HAS BEEN NO MAJOR CHANGE IN THE LINEUP OF STRIKERS. RAILWAY EMPLOYEES AND PORT COMMISSION WORKERS (BUT NOT STEVEDORES) ARE OFF THE JOB, WHILE MOST OTHER UNIONS ARE CONTENT TO SUPPORT THE STRIKE VERBALLY WITHOUT JOINING THE PICKET LINES. THE COMMUNIST PARTY/MOSCOW WING HAS ANGERED THE PRIME MINISTER BY ITS LACK OF BACKING FOR HER EFFORTS TO END THE STRIKE. END SUMMARY.

2. WE UNDERSTAND FROM SOURCES CLOSE TO THE PM, THAT SHE IS UPSET, PARTICULARLY AT HER SRI LANKA FREEDOM PARTY (SLFP) UNIONS AND AT THE COMMUNIST PARTY (CP) FOR NOT BEING ABLE TO PREVENT OR END THE CURRENT TEN-DAY OLD RAILWAY
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STRIKE. UNION MEMBERS FROM ALL PARTIES ARE REPORTEDLY OUT ALTHOUGH, AFTER THE PM'S TOUGH BROADCAST DECEMBER 29 (REF B), THE SLFP UNIONS WERE SCHEDULED TO MEET, PRESUMABLY TO TRY ONCE AGAIN TO INDUCE THE RANK AND FILE TO RETURN TO THE JOB. ALAVI MOWLANA, THE PM'S CONTACT MAN WITH HER PARTY UNIONS, HAS BEEN

UNCHARACTERISTICALLY QUIET UNTIL DECEMBER 30, WHEN HE ISSUED AN APPARENTLY INEFFECTUAL STATEMENT URGING THE WORKERS TO RETURN.

3. IF THE SLFP WORKERS ARE DEFIANT, IT IS THE COMMUNIST PARTY AND ITS APPARENT APPROVAL OF THE STRIKE THAT HAS REALLY UPSET THE PRIME MINISTER. WITH PIETER KEUNEMAN, THE SINGLE CP CABINET MEMBER, OUT OF TOWN DURING THE REGULAR DECEMBER 28 CABINET MEETING, THE PM REPORTEDLY LAID INTO THE COMMUNIST PARTY AND ITS LACK OF SUPPORT FOR THE GOVERNMENT. ATHTHA, THE CP DAILY NEWSPAPER, HAS CARRIED EDITORIALS CRITICIZING THE "STUBBORN STTITUDE" OF THE GOVERNMENT IN REFUSING TO NEGOTIATE WITH THE STRIKERS UNTIL THEY RETURN TO WORK, WHICH THEY CURRENTLY SHOW NO SIGN OF WANTING TO DO. ATHTHA CALLED THE SUMMONING OF THE ARMED FORCES A "DECLARATION OF WAR AGAINST THE WORKERS."

4. THE NEW OPPOSITION UNION FEDERATION, THE TRADE UNION COORDINATING COMMITTEE (COLOMBO A-101) CONSISTING OF THE CEYLON WORKERS CONGRESS, CEYLON MERCANTILE UNION AND OTHERS, HAS ISSUED A STATEMENT URGING THE GOVERNMENT TO NEOGTIAGE RATHER THAN TRY TO BREAK THE STRIKE, AND HAD CITED THE INCREASING HARDSHIPS FACED BY SRI LANKA WORKERS IN GENERAL, IN IMPLICIT SUPPORT OF THE STRIKERS' DEMANDS.

5. DEPUTY MINISTER OF DEFENSE AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS LAKSHMAN JAYAKODY AT HIS PRESS CONFERENCE DECEMBER 29 STRESSED THAT THE ARMED FORCES WERE NOT CAPABLE OF LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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RUNNING THE RAILROADS AND WERE NOT GOING TO TRY. IN FACT, THEY ARE BEING USED FOR SECURITY OF ESSENTIAL FACILITIES INCLUDING RAILWAY PROPERTY AND TO ASSIST IN THE DISTRIBUTION OF VITAL FOOD COMMODITIES AND FUEL. REED

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